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ABSTRACT

Intended for administrators, program planners, teachers, paraprofessionals and other personnel involved in special education, the booklet provides guidelines for working with culturally diverse children. Three philosophical positions regarding the culturally different are separatism (which maintains that children should be separated from one another on the basis of their ethnic background), the melting pot approach (which states that culture traits from distinct cultural groups should be allowed to merge), and cultural pluralism (which proposes that values, standards, and worth of all cultures must be allowed to exist within one society). Cultural pluralism is probably the most compatible with the national trend toward individualized programs for special preschoolers. Ten special needs in programs for culturally diverse children include the need to acknowledge whites from low socioeconomic backgrounds as culturally different, the need to expand program content to reflect the cultural variety of the population, and the need to involve parents in educating their children. In working with special preschoolers from minority backgrounds, it is important to keep in mind the fact that curriculums in special education have been systems of highly varied learning experiences with clearly articulated goals and objectives with the purpose of helping each child function better in the environment. Among the criteria for selecting curriculums are relevancy of goals, comprehensiveness, provisions for individualized and group instruction, remedial focus, validity and reliability, appropriateness, functional purpose, and the child's home, community and language. In modifying curriculums for culturally different children, different materials and languages, styles, and expectations need to be explored. A list of programs using three models (diagnostic-prescriptive, Piagetian, and behavioral) is appended, and a bibliography is offered. (SW)

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Planning for a Culturally Sensitive Program

Joy Hicks Cooper

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TADScript 81

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People involved in educating special children from various cultural backgrounds face a unique situation. While the children are no different from other children in terms of basic needs, they are different in background. This difference may lead them to respond in different ways from middle-class Anglo children to the same instructional approaches and content. Usually, however, the educational methods used with other kids work very well with culturally different children -- especially when the teacher, the school, and other branches of the educational community are sensitive to their cultural heritage. To be sensitive requires first that the professional know something about the other culture and second that he or she be alert to signs from the child which indicate that there is a learning or other problem primarily because of cultural rather than individual differences.

In this publication, we hope to give administrators (of state and local early childhood programs for special children), program planners, teachers, paraprofessionals, and other personnel involved in special education a few planning aids:

1. A review of the approaches that have been developed to help professionals work with culturally diverse children;
2. Guidelines for ensuring that services are really individualized and take into account cultural background; and
3. A discussion of various curricular approaches in use with

special children which concludes with ways to modify curriculums to suit culturally diverse children better.

We hope these aids will be used to make education more responsive to children from different backgrounds. Because our concern is curriculum for special children -- not placement -- we have omitted the issues of nondiscriminatory screening and assessment from our discussion. Among the many excellent publications on these topics is: Non-biased Assessment of Minority Group Children: With Bias Toward None (1978).

A REVIEW OF APPROACHES TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY

There have been many answers to the question: "How do you serve culturally diverse children best?" Our own answer is that as a beginning you recognize:

1. Children are children first.
2. We live in a multicultural society.
3. Children are alike in basic ways no matter what their cultural background; each child varies insofar as he or she is an individual.
4. Expectations regarding the way children should behave vary from culture to culture.
5. Children are often judged in school with criteria that vary considerably from the criteria used by their culture.
6. Positive school-home relationships are crucial in providing consistent, meaningful services to preschool handicapped children.

While spokesmen for the major "philosophical" positions on how best to educate these children would be unlikely to quarrel with any of the six

statements, they would each recommend that the issue of cultural background be dealt with in different ways. The three philosophical positions reviewed here are not the only perspectives around; they are, however, three of the most prominent.

Separatism. Should children be separated from one another on the basis of their ethnic background? "Yes" argue the separatists. Each culturally different group of children should have curriculums, instructional strategies, and other materials that are developed by people from their culture and that reflect the values of their culture (Huell, 1973; Churchville, 1972). Cultural or ethnic separatists may argue also that different cultural or ethnic groups should not come together for fear of racial mixing or loss of ethnic purity. Separate facilities may also be advocated by proponents of separatism. In this system, the ideologies and values of one particular culture are stressed with little or no regard for the values of other cultures.

Melting Pot. Cultural traits from distinct cultural groups should be allowed to merge according to proponents of this perspective. However, people who support this approach often ignore cultural differences -- be they values, standards, or needs -- and offer services based on what is best for the average Anglo-American special child. Culturally different children are expected to "leave their cultures at home" and accept the values of the majority culture (Banks, 1977). Curriculum and instructional strategies may or may not be culturally sensitive.

Cultural pluralism. Proponents of this approach maintain that the

values, standards, and worth of all cultures must be allowed to exist within one society. Unlike separatism and the melting pot perspectives, cultural pluralism encourages the coexistence of cultures in a manner that does not involve reducing or ignoring (one may be as bad as another) cultural differences. Four tenants (Commission on Multicultural Education, 1977) of people who follow this position are:

1. Values which support cultural diversity and the uniqueness of each individual should be taught.
2. The qualitative expansion of the various cultures within our society should be encouraged, and all cultures should be given socioeconomic and political equality in the mainstream of American life.
3. The exploration of alternative and emerging lifestyles should be supported.
4. Multiculturalism and multidialecticism should be encouraged.

INDIVIDUALIZED SERVICES

Of all the philosophical positions, cultural pluralism is probably the most compatible with the national trend toward individualized programs for special preschoolers. Racial, ethnic, and cultural associations are so much a part of a child's identity that any program proposing an individualized approach must take these factors into consideration (Hass, 1977). In his article entitled, "Special Program Needs of the Culturally Diverse Child," the late Jasper Harvey (1977) wrote, "Program staffs need to be concerned with analyzing and understanding the lifestyles of Americans who are linguistically and culturally different from the mainstream middle-class

American... The child should be afforded an individualized program on a developmental basis, and with significant regard for his or her own culture's expectations" (p. 162).

Individualizing special programs. We feel that cultural pluralism is among the best philosophical perspectives for guiding the development of special programs. For this reason, we think it is worthwhile to explore some of Harvey's (1977) work on individual planning for children of different backgrounds. He cited ten special needs in programs for culturally diverse children:

1. The need for educators to know and understand the different lifestyles of the children in their programs. Only with knowledge and understanding will professionals become sensitive to the "real" needs of culturally different children. When professionals who are aware of these special needs guide a child's development, there is less risk that home expectations and school expectations will differ.
2. The need to acknowledge whites from low socioeconomic backgrounds as culturally different. This group has almost become an "invisible minority." We must, however, realize that their cultural patterns are different from and often strongly opposed by middle-class white Americans.
3. The need to expand program content (i.e., curriculum) to reflect the cultural variety of the population. The content of programs can easily reflect the various cultures and perspectives of all the students and families they serve. For example, a Yaqui Indian legend was used in a University of Arizona preschool to develop a curriculum unit for children doing special tasks

related to auditory discrimination, auditory memory, verbal imitation, manual expression, etc.

4. The need for training in "cultural diversity." Teachers and other professionals need to receive pre- and inservice training on the differences between cultures. This training will help eliminate many of the negative stereotypes and fears that often accompany cultural ignorance.
5. The need to acknowledge the "historical" exclusion of the culturally different. This exclusion occurred on political, economic, and social fronts. Knowledge of history can sometimes keep a society from repeating mistakes.
6. The need for more understanding of the impact of public on personal attitudes. Teachers and other professionals must understand the public attitudes that have an impact on their relationship with minority children. For example, a few American psychologists contend that blacks and other minorities achieve below whites because of genetic inferiority. Barnes (1971) discussed the importance of not ignoring this group because of their potential influence on those at powerful policy-making levels.
7. The need to allow (and sometimes to help) the minority child to find him- or herself. Culturally different children often struggle with maintaining their own cultural identity in mainstream America.
8. The need to recognize the qualities held in common by various cultures and the differences which separate one culture from others. When educational professionals understand the ways

- cultures are alike, the differences are often easier to address.
9. The need for ongoing assessment. As is the case with all children, assessment with culturally diverse children should be broadly based and continuous.
 10. The need to involve parents in educating their children. While important for all programs, parent involvement is especially critical in programs for culturally different children.

CURRICULUMS

These ten considerations for planning should be augmented by a sound curriculum that is responsive to the backgrounds of the children in the program. But what is a sound curriculum? We would argue that it is a course of learning that includes ways to help children develop skills in the basic areas of thinking, communicating, interacting, moving, and adapting.

Should there be curriculums designed especially for culturally different children as well as for middle-class white children? That is a difficult question. Some authorities would say: "Yes. There should be curriculums tailored to each culture's special needs." Others would argue against such plans by maintaining that the material to be learned should be the same for all children.

The disagreement seems to hinge on the importance assigned to curriculum in the learning process. Some would maintain that it is the most important part of the educational environment. Others would reply that the teacher holds the central role. After all, it is the teacher who guides children through the curriculum. Perhaps, they argue, it makes more sense to allow the teacher to decide which parts of the curriculum should be modified for cultural reasons and which may stand for children of all cultures -- rather than producing different curriculums for each culture.

The debate is one which every educator must resolve for him- or herself. We feel that we can offer guidance best in this article by: 1) reviewing the purpose traditionally served by curriculums; 2) listing criteria for selecting curriculums; and 3) considering ways of modifying curriculums for minority children.

Curriculum Purpose

Traditionally, curriculums in special education have been systems of highly varied learning experiences with clearly articulated goals and objectives. Their main purpose has been to help each child function better in his or her environment.

It is important to keep this concept of a curriculum in mind when working with special preschoolers from minority backgrounds for the following reasons:

1. The learning experiences in special education curriculums are the ways children acquire knowledge. They include not only the content to be learned but also the method used by the teacher. Method is very important with culturally different learners: some teaching approaches that work well with children from the majority culture, work poorly or not at all with these children.
2. Highly varied means that the learning experiences are given in as many different settings as possible: the school, the home, the community, etc. This is a vital concept with minority children because learning outside the school is one way that the child can be kept in touch with his or her community and its values while being educated.
3. Goals and objectives are the guideposts of the curriculum. They are the end toward which learning experiences are directed. Just as teachers must modify experiences sometimes, they also must modify the objectives of the curriculum sometimes to suit the cultural and other

special needs of the children. What children need, of course, is determined partially by the perspective (i.e., values) of the curriculum developer or teacher. Therefore, professionals must be aware of how their values differ culturally from those of the learner. They must always try to answer the question: "What does the child need to function in his or her environment?"

Criteria for Selecting Curriculums

Clearly, criteria for choosing curriculums should be based squarely upon this one premise: They should aid the teacher in deciding whether the curriculum will help his or her children function better. The teacher must ask him- or herself: "Are my children from wealthy or poor families? Black, white, Indian, Chinese, or Puerto Rican families? Are their problems primarily motor, social, or language? Do they have sight or hearing problems? Speech problems?" The list could go on and on. The choice of a curriculum, however, must be made only after a thoughtful and diligent investigation of the specific purposes it will serve for the particular children in your care. If you serve minority children, keep that factor -- as well as other pertinent data -- in mind as you use these criteria:

1. Relevancy of goals -- Are the goals in the curriculum relevant to the needs and goals of the children and the overall objectives of the programs?
2. Comprehensiveness -- Does the curriculum include all of the learning experiences necessary for the child to function adequately in his or her environment? Does the curriculum cover all developmental areas (language, cognition, motor, social-emotional, adaptive development, etc.)?
3. Developmental approach -- Are the tasks developmentally and

logically sequenced? Is there a logical flow from easy to difficult?

4. Provisions for individualized and group instruction -- Are there options, when appropriate, for individual as well as group work?
5. Interdisciplinary -- Was the curriculum designed by, and can it be used by, people who work together but come from a variety of backgrounds: e.g., physical therapy, occupational therapy, education, the home (parents), etc.?
6. Systematic process of instruction -- Is the teaching methodology clear and systematic?
7. Task analyzed -- Are the items broken into small, teachable steps?
8. Remedial focus -- Does the curriculum focus on the dominant characteristics of the children? A motor-centered curriculum should not be chosen for children whose primary disabilities involve language.
9. Evaluation and data collection -- Are formative and summative evaluation mechanisms built into the curriculum? Can data be collected on student progress systematically?
10. Validity and reliability -- Has the curriculum been implemented with the children for whom it was designed?
11. Generalization skills -- Does the curriculum develop the child's ability to transfer or apply concepts in various situations beyond the learning center?

Do the criteria for selecting curriculums change when culturally different young children are the students? No. We do, however, have to ask ourselves additional questions.

12. Appropriateness -- Is the curriculum appropriate for your culturally different children? Can it be used as developed originally with your children or modified to meet their needs?
13. Functional purpose -- What are the experiences necessary for inner-city Mexican-American children (or other groups) to function adequately in their environment?
14. Child's home and community -- It may or may not be as different as you think.
15. Life experiences -- Does the curriculum allow for life experiences (e.g., field trips) that would be meaningful to the children with whom you are working?
16. Language -- Is the curriculum bilingual or does it allow for the maintenance of two languages by children using it?

You may think of other questions to raise and address that are specific to your own situation. For a more detailed discussion of issues in curriculum selection, see Perspectives on Measurement (TADS, 1979), pp. 20-28.

The Appendix of this article lists programs -- organized by the type of curriculums they use -- that work with special children from culturally diverse backgrounds.

Modifying Curriculums for Culturally Different Children

Generally, adapting curriculums for any purpose is a challenging and difficult task. Though the cultures of the children in any given program may vary, the goals and objectives of one curriculum may be appropriate to meet the needs of all your children. But, different materials and languages, styles, and expectations need to be explored when implementing the curriculum with culturally diverse students.

Materials and languages. For example: the Teaching Research Curriculum for moderately and severely handicapped children, which was developed by the staff of the Teaching Research Infant and Child Center (1980) in Oregon, lists the task "tells our sex" under cognitive skills at the three-year level. The task progresses from the student repeating his or her own sex after the teacher to the point at which the student can verbalize (or manually sign) his or her own sex and that of a person in a picture who is of the opposite sex. Suggested materials include pictures of boys and girls.

If some of the children in a program using the curriculum were Native Americans, pictures of Native American boys and girls should be considered. The teacher might also learn, with the help of the parents, native words for sex identification in the culture and incorporate them in the lesson.

Style. Varying the "style" one uses with culturally different children is often beneficial in increasing the speed of learning. For instance, discipline is handled differently across cultures. Kitano (1973) says of Asian children, "those who teach Asian children should have an understanding of both the indirect and direct methods of disciplining children. The Asian approach is indirect... The direct method, 'shut up,' represents a harshness that is frightening to many Asian children" (p. 15). On the other hand, other cultural minorities may only respond to this type of disciplinary harshness.

In teaching Mexican American children, it is important for teachers to understand that competition is almost nonexistent in Mexican culture (Aragon and Marquez, 1973). Therefore, teachers may need to be more encouraging and coaxing in their attempts to get these children involved in competitive activities.

Expectations. One way of deciding what to expect of the children is to involve their parents in their education. Involving mom or dad is acknowledged to be, throughout the literature on early education, an integral part of preschool handicapped programs. This involvement does not become less or more important when cultural diversity is an issue. However, educators should ask themselves certain questions when dealing with these parents:

- How should involvement be defined?
- What do these parents expect of the children?
- Does the school expect different behavior from the child's parent than is expected by the society in which the family lives?
- What objectives should be set for parents? (Remember: objectives must be tempered by values and needs.)
- How should we communicate with the parents?
- What criteria should we use to measure parent involvement?

Parents of culturally diverse handicapped preschoolers bring different values and perspectives to our programs. Meeting the needs of the children requires meeting the needs of the families. This makes it critical for us to develop an understanding of the values and cultures. Looking at "attachment behaviors" of minority-culture parents in a newborn intensive care unit, Valerie Casuso (1981) wrote, "When working with minority cultures, assumptions should not be made that these parents are detached and indifferent toward the newborn based solely on observed behavior. By gaining an understanding of the culture, behavior we might, at first, assume to be deviant may then be seen as appropriate. Knowledge of minority cultures is critical to effective communication between health care providers and the families they serve" (p. 21). Knowledge of minority cultures is also critical when adapting curriculums for minority handicapped preschoolers. Strategies for intervention

must be tailored to a family's background.

CONCLUSIONS

American preschoolers with special problems come from as many backgrounds as there are cultures represented in our society. Individualizing educational programs for them -- especially when they come from minority backgrounds -- requires that the educational community make certain preparations. As professionals, we must:

1. Become knowledgeable of the cultural values and perspectives of the children and families served.
2. Use that knowledge to develop appropriate strategies for achieving the goals of the curriculum.
3. Develop programs to enhance the ability of our students to function in their environment.
4. Use "cultural diversity" as one criteria for selecting and modifying curriculums.

APPENDIX

Selected Programs Using Three Models

MODEL 1, Diagnostic Prescriptive: The theory behind these models is that normal development is sequential and for different ages there are sets of normally expected developmental milestones.

Detroit's Preschool Pupil/Parent Professional Readiness Project
5057 Woodward Avenue, Room 1016
Detroit, MI 48202
(313) 494-1634
Beverly Johnson, Director

This program serves twenty educably mentally impaired students (three to seven years old) typifying the health, socioeconomic, educational, and cultural problems of its school district.

Early Education Opportunities for Preschool Handicapped Children
P.O. Box 759
Hato Rey, PR 00919
(809) 764-8059
Awilda Torres, Director

This two-site project (one in San Juan and one in Humacao) serves severely handicapped children ages three to eight.

Hampton Institute Mainstreaming Model (HIMM)
Special Education Program
Hampton Institute
Hampton, VA 23668
(804) 727-5434
James Victor, Director

This project serves children with significant developmental delays in motor, social, language and cognitive behavior. The project integrates nonhandicapped children from urban and rural locales with twenty to forty handicapped children aged two to five. Services to unserved minority and low-income children are emphasized.

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MODEL 2, Piagetian: This theory, which concerns cognitive development, has encouraged curriculum that focus upon sensorimotor skills (e.g., object permanence) and preoperational skills (e.g., seriation).

Community Resources in the Education of Exceptional Preschoolers (CREEP)
Davis School
34th and Cramer Streets
Camden, NJ 08108
(609) 541-1181
Olive Smith, Director

This project serves twenty-five severely handicapped children, ages birth to six. The program employs CETA-funded high school seniors in the project classroom as well as a parent liaison worker who provides special help with the cultural and language differences of Spanish-speaking families.

Adaptive Physical Education Program Providing Young Kids
Individualized Developmental Services (A PEPPY KIDS Project)
503 Castroville Road
San Antonio, TX 78237
(512) 434-7033
Sylvia E. Schmidt, Director

The program serves children, birth to eight years of age, with moderate to severe mental retardation, hearing, visual, speech, orthopedic, or other health impairments. Most children are bilingual.

Harleyville Early Learning Program (HELP)
South Carolina Department of Mental Retardation
Coastal Regional Center
Jamison Road
Ladson, SC 29456
(803) 873-5750
Rosemarie B. Gregory, Director

The project serves mildly and moderately mentally retarded and multihandicapped children (two-and-one-half to eight years old) for whom no appropriate program is available.

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MODEL 3, Behavioral: The basic assumption of this theory is that all children can learn if the proper techniques are applied (e.g., reinforcement, extinction).

Project Family Link I
Special Projects Division
Box 4170, Texas Technical University
Lubbock, TX 79409
(806) 742-3296
Mary Tom Riley, Director

The project serves forty-five handicapped children, birth to age four. Teachers are from the area served, and bilingual teachers are employed.

Parent Training and Early Education Program
Child Development Center
College of Medicine, Box 19
Howard University
Washington, DC 20059
(202) 686-6713
Rosa Trapp-Dukes, Director

This program serves children birth through age three who have or are suspected of having Down's syndrome.

Teaching Research Infant and Child Center
Todd Hall
345 N. Monmouth
Monmouth, OR 97361
(503) 838-1220
Torry Piazza Templeton, Director

This project is in outreach and has over 150 states using components of the demonstration model. Most ages and handicaps within the preschool range are served.

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